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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000538

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SUBJECT: CUBA: BIG BROTHER THREATENS LADY IN WHITE

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly; Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Ladies in White (Damas de Blanco) representative Laura Pollan travelled last week from Havana to Manzanillo, on the eastern end of the island, to attend to some family business. While there she also visited a religious shrine in nearby Santiago and was given permission by a priest to make a public prayer to ask for release of political prisoners.

12. (C) Pollan told Pol-Econ Counselor that on Saturday, May 26, at 11:20 p.m. her relatives in Manzanillo answered a knock on the door and were face to face with Lieutenant Colonel Samper, head of State Security's "Department 21," responsible for countering the activities of the dissident movement. The Havana-based Samper warned Pollan that "Things in the eastern provinces were calmer than in Havana and that she should watch her step." He said he would warn her political-prisoner husband, Hector Maseda, that her activities placed them both in danger. Pollan said that she responded by telling Samper to arrange for the GOC to release the political prisoners, which was the only way to put an end to the Damas' activities. While her husband and others remained in prison, Laura said she would continue to lead peaceful protests and prayers for their release. She said that she asked Samper to leave and told him that late-night knocks on the door and accompanying threats were a form of "psychological torture."

13. (C) Comment: We report this as a stand-alone vignette of the Cuban police state, where late-night knocks on the door are always possible, even at the end of a 14-hour bus trip from home. Laura Pollan, in our estimation, continues to grow in stature as she and the rest of the Damas resist the totalitarian regime with little more to work with than their courage and their human decency.
PARMLY